

# How To Wake Up Before You Have To



By Benjamin Marlin

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# Table of Contents

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Table of Contents .....	2
Introduction .....	3
Specific Methods.....	14
Alarms .....	14
Offbeat Alarms .....	19
Mental Methods .....	22
Helpful Tips .....	38
What will I do when.....	49
Special Note: Weekdays vs. Every Day .....	50
Conclusion.....	51
Other Resources.....	52
Feedback .....	53
Copyright.....	54

*To Denise, whose 6 a.m. encouragement is the one technique I'm not sharing with anybody.*

# Introduction

Everyone can wake up when they have to. When the alternative is getting fired or being late to our own wedding, waking up early is something we can and most likely will do.



**Utter catastrophe averted, for one more day.**

We cut it pretty close, though. Even if we **HAVE** to get out of bed at 7 am, we're not missing a minute of sleep before that.

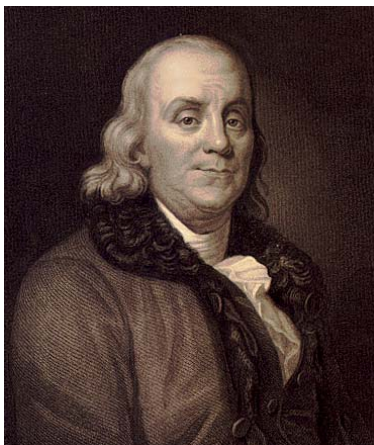
Sure, we might have a vague idea that waking up early would be good for us. Our parents talked to us about it. Benjamin Franklin said, "Early to bed and early to rise makes a man healthy, wealthy, and wise." Benjamin Franklin knew what was up.



**"When I say early rising made me wealthy, I mean it gave me MY OWN MONEY."**

In fact, if you're reading this book, waking up early probably makes sense to you. Chances are that it will continue to make sense to you, all through today, and into the night and wee hours of the morning.

Then your alarm goes off. Suddenly, Ben Franklin is less of an authority. What did he say again? "Early to.....something.....makes a man.....I forget. Man, it feels good in here."



**Eh, the man was never even President.**

In a moment, waking up early goes from a great idea to something vague and distant and having very little to do with your current physical reality.

Stealthily, your brain takes over. It coos: "Don't you feel good in bed right now? Why would you ever want to stop feeling like this?"

## **The PowerPoint**

Next, your tired brain gives you a very brief PowerPoint presentation, with just two slides, which I will describe here:

Slide 1: You, lying in bed, sleeping and smiling, with a rainbow overhead and cute little critters quietly dancing around your room. This slide is titled "Staying In Bed".



**Statistics show that you can't say no to a cute little beaver.**

Slide 2: You slogging your way through a dark, cold morning, dragging, falling over, and utterly miserable. This slide is titled "Waking Up".



**"I choose THIS option!"**

It is damned hard to resist this sales pitch. The message is, "You have a choice, and the answer is pretty obvious. Stay the heck in bed."

In the moment, it *is* obvious. Most of us choose Slide 1, with the happiness and rainbows and critters, and we go back to sleep for another hour or two. Only after we wake up does our brain get around to Slide 3.

Wait, there's a Slide 3? What's on it?



**“She wasn’t supposed to know about Slide 3.”**

Here’s what’s on Slide 3: you happily getting out of bed before you have to. You exercising when there’s barely anyone else at the gym. You catching up on your emails. You taking a peaceful walk around your neighborhood.

In Slide 3, the rainbows and cute critters are there too, and this time, you’re actually awake to appreciate them.

What’s missing from Slide 3? You rushing and fumbling your way through your morning routine because you slept past your alarm again. That rushed hour of joyless insanity between waking up and arriving at work. You having to jam all your pleasures and responsibilities in at night because there’s no time in the morning.

Slide 3 sounds awesome. It shows you waking up early, getting a lot done, and enjoying the whole thing. Why doesn’t your brain show it to you?

## **Tired Brain vs. Noble Brain**

Here’s where I theorize that your brain is locked in an epic struggle between what’s best for you and what feels good in the moment. For our purposes, I will call one side your "tired brain" and the other side your "noble brain". The scary part is that in this struggle, your tired brain has more guns, more supplies, and a comfy position on top of a hill.





**Your tired brain, laughing at you.**

You know your tired brain. It's closely related to your hungry brain, your sex-crazed brain, and your money-spending brain. It is not concerned with what is best for you. It knows nothing of missed appointments or dreams deferred. It has no use for the future. Your tired brain is only concerned with what feels good, right now. And at 6 am, what feels good right now is going back to sleep.

Now, along comes your noble brain, steadfast and pure-hearted. It wants you to wake up, accomplish your goals, and be happy in the long term. Unfortunately, your noble brain is only armed with a tiny slingshot and good intentions. Who's usually going to win this one?



**Similar odds.**

It probably won't shock you to hear that I am on the side of your noble brain. Your tired brain isn't all bad; it wants you to be safe and comfortable, which is fine in the right context. But I believe that only by listening to your noble brain - by doing what might not be safe and comfortable, but what is best for you in the long run - will you end up happy and fulfilled. This book is about empowering your noble brain so it can win the epic struggle and get you out of bed early in the morning.

## My Experience

A few times a year, I decide to wake up at 6 a.m. By waking up at 6 a.m., I can go to the gym when it's less crowded; I can read; I can write; I can relax a bit before heading to work.

Right up until 5:59 a.m. of my first morning, my plan makes perfect sense. It makes so much sense that I'm sure it can't fail. I become convinced that it's the only way I'm going to live my life in the future. I'm psyched about it. I tell my friends. In fact, they've probably come to expect it every few months.

Then my alarm actually goes off at 6 am. Immediately, my tired brain overpowers my noble brain. It says, "You don't HAVE to wake up now. Sure, it's a fine idea. You're probably some kind of hero just for considering it. Today just isn't the day, sport. Try it again tomorrow. It'll definitely work. For now, just close your eyes..." Halfway through that speech, I'm already unconscious.



**"That was some mighty good motivatin'."**

Sometimes my alarm goes off and I actually stumble out of bed. I look around at the quiet, sleeping world around me and wonder why I'm not part of it. Without a plan for my morning, I can't think of a single good reason to be awake.

Then my tired brain starts to chime in: "There's nothing going on right now. You tried, which is great, but you discovered that there's no point. If you go back to sleep right now, you can still get in 45 good minutes before you have to wake up. 44. 43. Don't waste this opportunity to get a little more sleep. You know you want it. 42. 41. Sleep. Sleeeeeeeep." So I do. I give in and go back to sleep, absolutely sure that I'll stay up for real tomorrow.



Sometimes, I even make it through the first day of waking up early, and maybe a few days after that. But it never lasts. I feel massively tired by the afternoon and close to dead by the evening. I forget that this is just a hump I have to get over, rather than a permanent condition. I try to remember why I'm waking up early, but my motivation isn't strong enough, and I haven't done nearly enough to disempower my tired brain as it attempts to bring me back to my old, easy, comfortable habits. Invariably, I give up.

## Why Is It So Tough?

Why is it such a challenge to wake up earlier than you have to? I've woken up early before. I used to wake up at 5 a.m. every day to go to work. My alarm went off, I got up, and I started my day. I didn't like it, but I did it. Why?

I did it because I had to. I had to pay my bills. I didn't want to get fired. Waking up late would have gotten me fired, so I didn't do it. That's sufficient motivation. For most of us, this motivation is built-in, and it prevents us from ignoring our alarm and completely ruining our lives.



**“I should never have hit the snooze button.”**

On the other hand, rising before you have to can be quite a challenge. The motivation isn't built-in. You have to build the motivation, and you have to make it stronger than the motivation to continue sleeping. You have to counter-intuitively leave your bed when you are still tired because deep down, you know it's better for you.

You have to get over the hump of being more tired than usual for a few days, or even a few weeks. All of this is worth it, but none of it comes naturally.

## My Quest

Recently, I started another early-rising crusade. It was probably my 8th or 9th try in the past few years, and before this, I was batting .000. I didn't even tell my friends about this one because I was ashamed of failing again.

However, I approached this round differently. Rather than relying on sheer willpower, I looked for tricks, methods, and insights that would make the process easier for me. My search focused on two questions, which form the basis of this book:

1) How can I quiet my "tired brain" so it doesn't prevent me from waking up when I want to?

and

2) How can I change my thinking so waking up early comes easily, naturally, and even happily?

When I asked those questions, I got a ton of answers. Some of them were drawn directly from the insights of others. Some of them were adapted from similar insights, even if the original authors hadn't considered applying their insights to early rising. And some of them, I came up with myself, because nothing else was working.

Amazingly, some of my methods worked. They didn't work perfectly, and there was no instant magic involved. But they worked well enough that I feel confident about my ability to consistently wake up early in the future.

Now, for the first time, waking up at 6 a.m. doesn't feel like an abomination or something unnaturally awful I am doing to myself. It just feels normal. I wake up at 6 a.m. It's what I do. I don't fight it. I don't even feel the need to fight it. I just get up and start my day an hour earlier than I used to.

## This Book

There is an abundance of material out there on waking up early. Much of it focuses on common-sense steps like getting enough sleep and avoiding the snooze button. All of this is good advice and should be ignored at your own peril. At the same time, none of it completely pushed me over the wall or made me a happy early riser. The common-sense steps struck me as an essential building block but nowhere near the entire story.

I have attempted to take this book in a different direction. Much of it is about identifying the mindset of a struggling early riser and changing it to that of someone who can consistently and easily wake up when he or she wants to. I am not a psychologist, but I do attempt to lay out, step-by-step, what happened in my brain as I changed my habit, in the hopes that you will recognize some of the same thought processes in yourself.

I do discuss more earthly techniques, such as alarm clocks and coffee, but often critically, and they are not the focal point of the book. For what it's worth, though, you absolutely should avoid the snooze button like the plague.

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